

# Iran pushes for preservation of Blue Mosque of Yerevan

Iranica Desk

The Blue Mosque, as the only active mosque and the last remaining example of Iranian architecture in Armenia, welcomes hundreds of foreign visitors each day. During a recent visit by Deputy Cultural Heritage, Handicraft and Tourism Minister for Tourism Affairs Anoushirvan Mohseni Bandpey, Iran officially submitted a request to the Armenian government to launch a new phase of restoration for this significant historic monument. Also known as the “Jaame Mosque of Yerevan,” it is considered the most important Iranian heritage site in Armenia and, according to historical records, one of the few Islamic structures in the region built entirely with traditional Iranian brick architecture, according to chtn.ir. The Blue Mosque, a prominent symbol of Iran’s historical and cultural presence in the Cau-

casus, stands out in Yerevan’s predominantly tuff-stone urban landscape as a building constructed entirely in the Iranian architectural tradition. In terms of style, layout, and decoration, it is regarded as one of the most significant Qajar-era structures located outside Iran’s borders. The mosque includes 28 chambers, a prayer hall, a central courtyard, and a large open plaza. While parts of it have been restored with hand-carved stonework, the main structure has retained its authentic Iranian architectural identity. According to historical documents, Qajar-era travelogues, and archival materials in Yerevan, the mosque was built in the 18th century. After periods of deterioration, it underwent a full restoration in 2000 under Iran’s supervision, following a cultural cooperation agreement between the two countries. Iran has now submitted a new official proposal to Arme-

nia to begin the second phase of restoration, focusing on the preservation and revitalization of the mosque’s architectural ornamentation. Beyond its religious and architectural importance, the Blue Mosque holds strategic value for Iran’s cultural diplomacy. Estimates indicate that between 300 and 500 foreign tourists visit the site daily, making it one of the most-visited representations of Iranian culture outside the country. Officials from Iran’s Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts believe the Blue Mosque could serve as a designated center for promoting Iranian tourism attractions in Yerevan. Establishing an information hub offering brochures, maps, multimedia content, and travel itineraries could encourage foreign visitors to continue their journeys into Iran, contributing significantly to the growth of inbound tourism.



● wikipedia.org

## Arrival of migratory swans marks promising season for Solduz Wetland



● chtn.ir

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The graceful presence of migratory swans once again echoed across the Solduz Wetland with the arrival of the first group of these birds, the Director General of the West Azarbaijan Department of Environment announced. Hojjat Jabari stated that the landing of the initial flock in the Solduz Wetland signals a hopeful improvement in habitat conditions and reflects the growing international ecological value of the site. According to Jabari, environmental experts recorded the presence of 14 whooper swans during routine monitoring — the first such sighting in the country this year, chtn.ir wrote. Jabari emphasized that the arrival of these whooper swans marks the beginning of the migration season. Solduz Wetland is the first wetland in Iran this year to officially register the presence of migratory swans. He explained that the birds stop in Solduz to rest and feed as they continue their journey from northern regions to southern habitats, moving toward warmer environments as temperatures drop. He noted that the landing of whooper swans indicates that the wetland currently enjoys favorable water conditions and adequate habitat security, free from human disturbance and illegal hunting, enabling it to host this sensitive species. Jabari added that the wetland’s water supply is sustained by inflow from nearby rivers and seasonal streams around the Sol-

duz plain, surface runoff from rainfall, and potential partial recharge from local groundwater, in addition to the region’s designated water rights. Jabari further highlighted that a wide variety of waterfowl and shorebirds — including whooper swans, geese, migratory ducks, storks, and dozens of other species — arrive at Solduz Wetland each year for wintering. Numerous native bird and animal species also inhabit the surrounding areas, making the wetland an ecologically rich zone. Solduz Wetland is located on the southern shore of Lake Urmia, on the outskirts of Naqadeh. Covering an area of 375 hectares and situated at an average elevation of 1,277 meters above sea level, it serves as a crucial habitat for important and vulnerable bird species that spend part of the year there. Beyond its ecological significance, Solduz Wetland is an important recreational site for residents of Naqadeh as well as people from various cities and villages across West and East Azarbaijan provinces, offering a natural attraction with few comparable alternatives. The region features long, relatively cold winters and mild to warm summers — a climate classified as cold steppe. The wetland is man-made, created in 2001 when local residents constructed an embankment across the Godarchay River between Lake Urmia and the current wetland location. Today, it is fed by the Godarchay River and a significant portion of the drainage outlet from the Hasanlou Reservoir Dam.

## Zandiyeh Complex emerges as Shiraz’s global heritage hope

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Zandiyeh Complex of Shiraz — the enduring legacy of Karim Khan Zand, the benevolent ruler known as Vakil al-Ro’aya — has long stood among the most visited historical sites in Fars Province. Now, with its potential inscription on UNESCO’s World Heritage List under review, hopes are rising that the very heart of Shiraz may soon secure a place on the global travel wish-lists of international visitors. Although Shiraz is widely recognized as Iran’s foremost tourist destination — celebrated as the cultural and literary capital of ancient Persia and as a provincial center with 13 World Heritage properties — none of the city’s historical monuments has yet been individually registered as a World Heritage Site. To date, only Eram Garden has been listed, and that within the collective nomination of the “Persian Garden.” Today, the Zandiyeh Complex offers Shiraz a new opportunity to shine more brightly and present itself more prominently to the international tourism arena, according to IRNA.



Comprising the Karim Khan Citadel, Vakil Mosque, Vakil Bazaar, and the former Divankhaneh and Naqqareh-khaneh Square, the ensemble was constructed over several years more than 220 years ago by Karim Khan Zand. The citadel served as the military and political headquarters of the Zand capital; the Divankhaneh housed the administrative offices; the bazaar functioned as the economic center; and the mosque and bathhouse formed the social and communal heart of Shiraz during the Zand era. Situated along the historic Zandiyeh axis, the complex consistently ranks among the five most visited attractions by Iranian tourists during peak travel seasons such as Nowruz and summer. Its anticipated World Heritage inscription could soon place it firmly on the itineraries of international travelers exploring Iran. Salehi Amiri, the Minister of Cultural Heri-

tag, Tourism and Handicrafts, announced during his visit to Shiraz in November 2024 that the Zandiyeh Complex would be developed and prepared for UNESCO World Heritage inscription. He stated, “The Karim Khan Zand Citadel in Shiraz will be expanded and is moving toward World Heritage listing.” Following this announcement, steps were taken to bring this goal closer to reality. At the same time, various speculations emerged regarding potential obstacles to its achievement — each of which merits consideration. The Deputy Head of Fars Province’s Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization for Cultural Heritage Affair Sadeq Zare’ said, “The World Heritage inscription of the Zandiyeh Complex is one of this department’s main priorities, and Shiraz Municipality is also determined to see this nomination through.” He said that every historical property being considered for inscription must complete a nomination file before UNESCO evaluators can be invited to assess its conditions. He added, “The manager for the Zandiyeh Complex nomination has now

tourism and the inscribed property itself. Sabouki added, “First, inclusion on the World Heritage List provides excellent publicity, making it highly effective in attracting international tourism markets.” He noted that there is a global ‘bucket list’ from which many travelers choose their destinations, and World Heritage sites are prominently featured on that list. The veteran tourism expert continued, “Economic development and increased income for residents of the host city are among the other positive outcomes. More tour guides find employment, hotels and other accommodation facilities fill up, and the businesses surrounding these heritage sites experience greater prosperity.” Sabouki said that beyond these benefits, the inscription of a site on the World Heritage List creates strong imagery and branding for the host city or village — an influence that significantly enhances the development of the tourism economy and even shapes the local culture. It instills a



Vakil Mosque  
● wikipedia.org



Karim Khan Citadel  
● hipersia.com

been appointed and officially introduced by the ministry. Funding is being secured and a contract is in the final stages of conclusion — an important step forward in advancing this nomination file.” Experts agree — and global experience has repeatedly demonstrated — that the inscription of a historical heritage site on the World Heritage List opens up wide-ranging opportunities for tourism in the host city or village. Amin Sabouki, university professor and veteran tourism expert of Fars Province, said, “Being listed as a World Heritage Site is extremely important for the recognition of a place, because tourists consistently prefer to include world heritage properties when choosing their travel destinations.” In his view, the global registration of a historical site has profound and multi-dimensional impacts on both the region’s

sense of pride among residents and, in turn, raises public awareness. He also emphasized the impact of world heritage listing on the improved protection of historical complexes, noting that afterward, both the public and authorities pursue the preservation of the site and its surrounding buffer zone with greater concern — much as has been observed with Persepolis and Pasargadae. However, he also pointed out that the global inscription of a historical complex may introduce certain restrictions, stricter regulations, and challenges for people living around these sites. Nevertheless, Sabouki believes that if government authorities ensure that local residents share in the benefits of such an inscription, they will themselves become the leading advocates for its protection.